

# Crime Victims' Compensation Fund



By Greg Abbott  
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Ruth Mahl's life was violently changed on Feb. 21, 1995. That day, she was beaten and choked while cleaning her car in a Southwest San Antonio car wash. An apparent victim of gang violence, Ruth was left with a disfigured face. Her assailant literally took away her ability to smile.

She had plastic surgery in 1997 to repair the damage, but it didn't help much.

"I was depressed and crying," Ruth recalls. "I had a scar on my face from a gun, and I got so angry at that bad man."

Her suffering continued for five years, until Ruth discovered she could receive money from the Crime Victims' Compensation Fund for additional plastic surgery. The Fund—administered by the Texas Attorney General's office—provided almost \$20,000 for the two operations she needed.

Today, Ruth can smile again. She can't see the scar anymore, and she can face the world with her head held high.

Last year, my office helped almost 16,000 people like Ruth. They are adults and children, male and female. They are victims of assault, sexual abuse, robbery, kidnapping, and arson,

among other offenses. Through the Crime Victims' Compensation Program, we help them shoulder the burden of expenses they bear because of their injuries. More than \$71 million was paid out to victims in 2003—the most ever—to cover medical, child care, travel, relocation and other expenses that directly result from the crimes committed against them.

Even better, Texas taxpayers aren't footing the bill. Most of the Fund's money comes from court fees paid by convicted lawbreakers. This is consistent with the program's premise, which states criminals should bear the financial responsibility for their actions and crime victims should be the beneficiaries.

Gratifying as it is to help so many, our ability to do so is in jeopardy. A few years ago, as the Texas and national economy began to worsen, the Crime Victims' Compensation Fund was targeted as a source of revenue to replace losses in other agency programs, many not directly related to crime victims. In 2001, the Legislature appropriated \$70 million from the Fund. Last year, that number swelled to \$114 million. These diversions have put the Fund, and our ability to help victims, at great peril.

Simply put, unless something is done, the Fund will be insolvent in two years. Diverting additional dollars from the fund in future legislative sessions will only take dollars and

services from victims and lead the fund to extinction.

I have joined an array of victims' rights groups to formulate aggressive strategies for protecting the Fund in the next legislative session. In this time of tight budgets, our task will be a challenging one. However, we will work with the Legislature to make sure this source of hope is available for future crime victims.

The Crime Victims' Compensation Fund celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. We must carry on its legacy so more people like Ruth can smile again.

Information on this and other topics is available on the Attorney General's Web site at [www.oag.state.tx.us](http://www.oag.state.tx.us).